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ABSTRACT

Expressing the imagination dramatically is a step toward refining and shaping thought and behavior. Imagination is a part of the complex interaction of thought and action and has a place in the knowledge base. Drama is a direct expression of the imagination in action. In drama, the thought--the imaginings--are expressed in action and that action is metaphor--the idea becoming reality. Metaphor transposes the qualities of one thing to another and, when structured correctly, drama does this and becomes a living metaphor. This use of the metaphor allows one to grasp and change one's environment. It is a transformation of the action of the imagination, a course apparatus like the eye, into more refined shapings of one's perception of the world. Therefore, drama as metaphor should be practiced in educational settings at all levels as a core area of the human curriculum. (HOD)

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DRAMA AS LIVING METAPHOR--THE ROLE OF IMAGINATION

by

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Those of you who read programs will notice that I have changed my topic somewhat - actually sharpened it a little I think. I want to talk to you about:

DRAMA AS LIVING METAPHOR--THE ROLE OF IMAGINATION

A year ago, almost to the day, I responded to a research paper Dr. Charles Coombs presented on "Piaget's Epistemology Applied to an Analysis of Creative Drama in Education." At that time I suggested that more needed to be done on the role of imagination in this work. Charles has, very kindly asked me to present some of my ideas on the imagination and some of the stimuli for what I will share with you came from Charles' work on Piaget which was published in summary form in the Spring issue of Children's Theatre Review.[1]

I must apologize to you and to him for appearing before you in this way--it was simply not possible for me to be in two places at once, so I appear--cloned--in this fashion.

I want to talk to you about drama, imagination and metaphor and try to draw a significant relationship among the three.

My purpose, simply put, is this--I am trying as I have been doing as some of you know, for some time, to establish the crucial significance of drama in educational settings--crucial because it deals directly with the imagination and that imagination is vital to the way we, as highly developed upper primates, know and feel.

The work of Piaget, that Charles examined, is largely concerned with how the child gains knowledge. For Piaget, human action provides the raw materials for a perceptual and intellectual adaptation. He traces the different actions from the relatively overt, sensory motor ones of the young child to the increasingly internalized and covert ones that approximate thought. In explaining Piaget's approach Coombs notes that "His theory is based on the biological phenomenon of adaptation, a process he translates into a psychological frame of reference and calls equilibration . . . Equilibrium is achieved through the dual processes of assimilation and accommodation--the assimilation of new information into existing schemes, and the accommodation of these schemes to fit new information or to relate previously unrelated schemes with each other."[2]

In Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood[3] Piaget explores the different types of playful activities of childhood. It is here, of all his writings, that he comes closest to a careful examination of dramatic play. But he fails to develop clearly the role of the imagination in this--it was not his intent, of course, as he was building instead an epistemotogical scheme.

The area of the imagination is a difficult topic because it is elusive. Almost all books on drama refer to the imagination, seeing drama as an expression of the imagination.

For example, developing the imagination is one of Winifred Ward's objectives for playmaking;[4] Virginia Koste in Dramatic Play in Childhood has a chapter titled "Imagination and Transformation";[5] and Nellie McCaslin includes a chapter called "Imagination is the Beginning"[6] in her book.

But there is little effort to clarify what is meant or what exactly is the conceptual relationship between drama and imagination. This is not so strange for imagination, as I said, is elusive. The territory of the imagination has been a

field of study for philosophers, poets, psychologists, art critics, aestheticians, epistemologists as well as teachers. In what is still one of the most comprehensive analyses of imagination, Coleridge, In Biographia Literaria writes:

> "The PRIMARY IMAGINATION I hold to be the living power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The SECONDARY IMAGINATION I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates in order to recreate or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and unify. It is essentially vital . . ."[7]

But later writers, particularly in this century, have down played the role of the imagination agreeing with Sartre that imagination suffers from "essential poverty" and a "nothingness of being."[8] This apparent and inherent ambiguity is neatly summed up by Samuel Beckett: "No trace anywhere of life you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine."[9]

Yet there is a fruitful field here to be explored despite the difficulty and to hold the topic for study I will use an example posed by a philosopher--E. J. Furlong--who seeks to answer the question, What is meant by imagination?

Furlong uses the example, familiar to us in drama, of a young child playing, playing bears, down on the floor growling and grimacing--what Peter Slade would call "personal play" Piaget "symbolic play" and what I'd classify as dramatic play. Furlong states that such play shows imagination and he examines what the child is doing and also might have been doing but is not.

He might have been playing bears in his imagination, lying in his cot playing bears in his head. He is not doing this, not daydreaming; he is physically, actively involved.

Neither is the child sitting quietly supposing what might happen if . . . He is making believe, not believing. My paraphrase of this important distinction is that the child is creating his own reality, not living in a present reality but like the artist he is building his own world for exploration.

Thus Furlong goes on "Peter is not, then, as might have been, playing bears in imagination nor is he supposing nor mistakenly believing. In what sense then is he exercising his imagination? The answer, I think, is that he is playing bears with imagination. By this I mean roughly that his play shows originality, creativeness, possible sympathy . . . he is not merely reproducing, merely imitating: there is an original streak in his performance."[10]

An interesting analysis from a philosopher for it emphasizes a deliberate use of the imagination and in a creative, basic, artistic manner. Also there is a suggestion that the imagination is being used as a resource to explore being.

Another perspective on imagination is given by Bronowski who links the words, visual, vision and visionary; image, imagery and imagination. He says, "Almost all the words that we use about experiences of the kind that go into visions or images are words connected with the eye and the sense of sight."[11] This is more than simple chance for the sense of sight has played a most significant role in human evolution and it is clearly the most dominant of our senses. Note too how it dominates our methods of perception--we often ask, "Do you see?" when we are questioning understanding.

There is something else to consider here. Our vision is so much more delicate and able to discriminate than the vision of the other upper primates. Therefore it would be expected that our vision has become finely developed to make such discriminations. This is not so, for ". . . the brain has to solve the problem of achieving fine discrimination with a coarse apparatus."[12]

Without going into this in detail, though it is fascinating--to me at least, --the explanation for how the eye works reveals a rather coarse apparatus designed to receive certain information in a certain way. To oversimplify--we "see" straight lines because that is what the eye is wired up to look for.

Bronowski makes two more points that are important for this discussion. He is prepared to generalize from this model of the eye. --"In many ways you can say about all human problems, . . . that they always center around the same problem: How do you refine the detail with the apparatus which remains at bottom grainy and coarse?"[13]

At this point let me say I am prepared to characterize the imagination as a somewhat coarse apparatus--one of the reasons writers have had so much trouble pinning it down. But through its use in overt situations we can begin to move towards finer discrimination and clarity, that the imagination expressed dramatically is a step toward refining and shaping thought and behavior.

This is not too farfetched a leap, for Bronowski goes on to say " . . . we are dependent on (the eye) not only in looking outward but in looking inward. . . . We cannot separate the special importance of the visual apparatus of man from his unique ability to imagine . . ."[14]

Drama is usually related to the overt play activities of man and woman and for a long time play has been characterized as a frivolous, non-productive activity. In a thorough examination of play that rejects most of the earlier explanations for play as unacceptable, J. M. Ellis advances a very strong case for play as a high level arousal-seeking activity that is linked directly to our involvement with change. Play is such a strong force that it has been genetically advanced through the species.

Play behavior elevates the individual beyond the basic survival drives and into constant contact with the elements in the environment that are changing and produce change. As Ellis points out: "Play behavior has adaptive significance for the individual by broadening the breadth of experience the individual has to draw on in meeting the challenges of change. The animals that survive to breed tend to pass on their inherited predispositions to play, thus influencing the playfulness of the species."[15]

As in the case of sight, we are involved here with a vital function of the human being. Play has enabled us, the human animal, to develop behavioral flexibility

to cope with change, seeking it out and adapting to it. We learn through play. We seek it out as pleasurable and it develops in complexity within the individual as a developmental activity.

What Ellis has done is demonstrate the significance of play for the human being, for the kind of animal we have become. Play, then, and sight are important characteristics of our humanness and for those of us who teach drama the link between imagination and play is clear--we are, in fact, working with highly significant and crucial human characteristics.

I want now to examine the relationship between imagination and drama. Richard Courtney in The Dramatic Curriculum moves to the heart of the matter when he says, "One essential characteristic of drama is that it has tension. It pulls between two poles: between imagining and action; between the inner and outer."[16] It is an external, overt expression of internal thoughts and imaginings which themselves have been shaped by our perception of the world around us and the world we have built within us. It is important to linger on this complicated process of thought for it leads us back to Piaget and to the center of this discussion.

The senses influence our perception. They provide us with the raw information which we shape into thought and action. As pointed out earlier, the sense of sight is dominant and greatly influences our perceptions. These perceptions are shaped into images which, according to Courtney, are sequenced ". . . combined into sequences--groups of images which make up thoughts or imaginings."[17]

Now to externalize these thoughts or imaginings we must do so in acts, or behavior patterns. So, there is a sequence between perceiving, imaging, imagining and acting. The sequence is cyclic and continuous.

Other facts also must be taken into consideration in what is a complex process. As Bronowski has shown, the data received by the eye are selectively chosen and transformed. We order these data to fit our perception of what we expect to see and so we are in constant interaction with our environment, responding to it but also shaping it to our expectations.

In his analysis of the child's mental development, Piaget sees the child in a dynamic dialectical relationship with the world. The child is constantly assimilating new experience into his or her existing knowing structures or schema. He then accommodates the experience by generalizing it, adapting it to the schema, so that the schema alters to fit new occurrences or observations. Like Ellis, Piaget considers the human organism as actively seeking out stimulation and constructing knowledge from this interaction. Piaget's work on the genesis of knowledge is thorough and cannot be covered in this short space. Its relationship to drama was explored in Coombs' work where a case was made for a relationship between the two.

Piaget does not fully discuss the role of the imagination in the child's development. He sees it as a hunch, an intuition existing at a pre-conceptual stage of the knowing process.

"Imagination is not a faculty . . . It is one of the two poles of all thought, that of free combination and mutual assimilation of schemes. In this sense symbolic assimilation is a source of creative imagination i. e. of spontaneous constructive activity, as distinct from accommodation to reality and from both logical and experimental verification."[18]

Piaget is building a system of knowing and that system does not include the imagination as a central ingredient. It is sufficient to point out here that imagination is a part, even for Piaget, of the complex interaction of thought and action and has a place in the knowledge base of the human animal.

Drama is the expression of thought in action, but it is a special kind of action similar to the overt play activities we associate with children. Drama is physically active; it structures the play process and involves a direct exploration of behavior, usually human, through interactive involvement of the participants. It need not be an activity limited to children though it tends to be used more at the elementary level in this country than at other levels. The thoughts expressed flow from the imagination and are expressed in an imaginative way through the drama.

The definition given by the Attleboro Conference in 1973 includes the notion of metaphor.

> "Drama is the metaphoric representation of concepts and persons in conflict in which each participant is required to imaginatively project himself into an identity other than his own through enactment or to empathize with others doing so."

I want now to come back to the imagination and explore it in terms of metaphor and to do so I am indebted to Bronowski's thoughtful lectures on The Origins of Knowledge and Imaginations.

In shaping our world we embrace it as a system and from a scientific point of view that system is explored as if it were consistent. When is it revealed as not being consistent then it is reorganized. "That reorganization," says Bronowski, "is the central act of imagination . . . The act of imagination is the opening of the system so that it shows new connections . . . every act of imagination is the discovery of likenesses between two things which were thought unlike."[19]

There is nothing too remarkable in this; those of us in the field have known this for a long time. What is significant is the example Bronowski gives, that of Newton seeing the likeness between a thrown apple and the moon's relationship to the earth. The idea that revolutionized scientific thinking for hundreds of years, and that we think of in the precise formula $G = K \frac{mmi}{r^2}$, began as metaphor, seen first in terms of two disparate images. If a ball is thrown out--it falls to the ground. If it is thrown harder, it falls further out. If it is thrown so hard that it falls exactly as fast as the horizon, it will go all the way around the world. All major scientific discoveries seem to have this metaphorical base, the tying of disparate images together before any symbolic scientific formula is worked out to explain them. The discovery of the shape of the D.N.A. molecule, Max Planck's discovery that radiation energy comes in lumps or quanta, Einstein's work on time all seem to have been conceived first as metaphor and only later developed into scientific algorithms. Consider, as example, Einstein's simple but revolutionary question--"What would the world look like if I rode on a beam of light?"

For Bronowski the link between the imagination and metaphor is clear. He states:

> "All acts of the imagination . . . take the closed system. They inspect it, they manipulate it and then they find something which has not been put into the system so far. They open the system up, introduce new likenesses whether it is Shakespeare saying, "My mistresse eyes

> are nothing like the Sunne" or it is Newton saying that the moon in essence is exactly like a thrown apple. All those who imagine take parts of the universe which have not been connected hitherto and enlarge the total connectivity of the universe by showing them to be connected."[20]

Metaphor uses language in a symbolic way, a symbol of a symbol in fact, and by tracing language back to its source we find that metaphor uses images in a new way; an image is perceived or appears in terms of another image as that image. In a language sense we transform the images through the symbolic use of words. "The warrior is a lion in battle." This act of transposing and making new connections is the source of our creativity, reflecting our ability and apparently our need to move into new realizations about our existence. Of course such action involves the imagination and it is here that I wish to involve drama.

Drama is metaphor in action, it is living metaphor, an enlivement of the imagination directly into human enactment--further, drama is a metaphor for living. What I am saying is that drama is a direct expression of the imagination in action, overt, alive in the form moreover of life itself, not a simile or imitation but in the fullest and best sense--a metaphor.

In drama the thoughts, the imaginings are expressed in action and that action is metaphor, the idea becoming reality. Piaget tells of his daughter seeing a dead duck which had been plucked lying on a table. The next day he found her lying stiff on the couch. She explained to him when he asked if she were ill, "No, I'm the dead duck"--the words were for the adult, the action was for her own grasp of the universe. Both are metaphor though I would suggest the latter is the more real.

The philosopher's example quoted earlier of the young boy playing at bears is also an example of metaphor--the boy is, from his point of view, a bear; not really a bear of course but not pretending either for that would be simile, like a bear (which, unfortunately, is all that a great deal of drama teaching attempts). He is creating a reality in which he is always becoming a bear, taking on the qualities and attributes of a bear. In other words exploring life from a bear's point of view. Metaphor--in fact, living metaphor.

You see, in metaphor we transpose the qualities of one thing to another. Drama, when structured correctly, does this, becomes living metaphor. And this use of metaphor is at the heart of our ability to grasp and change our environment. It is a transformation of the action of the imagination, a coarse apparatus like the eye, into more refined shapings of our perception of the world.

I have tried to demonstrate the importance of imagination and metaphor to human existence. Drama as a form of metaphor must be considered as more than a frill or a simple introduction to the art of theatre. It is clearly rooted in the expressive, basic behavior of human beings as they search for knowledge about themselves and their universe. Drama is clearly linked to play which, in humans,

is a significant arousal-seeking activity and it has a direct relationship with the imagination which is itself a central activity in the way we acquire knowledge and perceive of our existence.

By characterizing drama as metaphor, it is squarely placed in the mainstream of the way we learn about ourselves, both inwardly and outwardly. Therefore, it follows that drama, as metaphor, should be practiced in educational settings at all levels, as a core area of the human curriculum.

What I have argued for here is a clarification of the relationship between the imagination and drama. I have tried to draw a clear line between the sense of vision and the imagination. I have suggested that play is significant in our human existence and thoughts and action are intertwined. I have explored the significance of metaphor and imagination to us. And I have drawn all these together by identifying drama as living metaphor. By doing so the case has been made that drama, properly practiced, provides experiences that are linked directly to our unique way of knowing, feeling and expressing as human beings.

I have not considered here the recent fad of discussing the brain in terms of its right and left hemispheres nor have I discussed the information becoming available on brain scanning. My limited knowledge of both topics does not lead me to change my thinking about the significance of drama. Conversations with several neurosurgeons have reinforced my belief in the incredible complexity and diversity of the functions of the brain and point to the dangers of trying to find simple answers to complicated questions. The marvelous intertwining network of the brain in its totality is a good symbol for the total diverse and complex behavior of humans.

Last year I mentioned in conclusion that to better understand the reasons for using drama in education we needed to identify the impulses to drama in each of us. I have attempted that here in a beginning way. From this we need to build decent theoretical bases for the work so many of us do to clarify and substantiate that drama is significant and essential. Thank you.

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